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QUESTION OF EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION ON
AND INCREASE IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE
SECURITY COUNCIL AND RELATED MATTERS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Identical letters dated 15 March 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

The method known as the Arria Formula is associated with the name of the representative of Venezuela on the Security Council during my country's most recent term as a non-permanent member of the Council. That compels us to make the comments contained in this letter as a contribution to the discussion that is now taking place, both in the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation On and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council, and in the Council itself.

The contemporary conflicts that constitute threats to international peace and security are increasingly displaying their non-traditional nature, as are the actors involved.

During Venezuela's presidency in 1992, the Security Council deemed it appropriate and necessary to obtain direct assessments from individuals, organizations or institutions that could, because of their responsibilities or personal or institutional influence, contribute to a better understanding of the situation under consideration.

Given the non-governmental status of such actors, or the fact that they were not even States Members of the Organization, the Council believed that such contacts should be informal and should take place outside the Council Chamber, thus respecting the rights and duties of the Member State or States involved.

It is worth recalling in this context that, while nothing prevented the Presidency of the Council or its members from establishing informal contacts or exchanges of this nature with the parties to a conflict from the standpoint of their national interests or the interests of groups of countries (the five permanent members, the Group of Non-Aligned Countries, and so on), it was not the practice of the Council as a whole to engage in such exchanges.

Consequently, these informal consultation exercises enabled the Council as a whole to obtain direct information and assessments concerning the dominant perceptions at a given moment on the part of those who directly or indirectly influenced the course of a conflict resolution process. In this way, the principle of collective responsibility of the Council was emphasized and the transparency of informal consultations was enhanced, as was the process of reconciling approaches among its members. Accordingly, these consultations demonstrated their usefulness without undermining the responsibility of the Council or that of the Secretary-General and his special representatives.

The Arria Formula constitutes, in our view, a treasury of Security Council procedures - the product of experience and of a pragmatic vision of its responsibilities.

This informal mechanism should be used, as it has been up to now, at the discretion of the President of the Security Council and with the authorization of its members. Nevertheless, the Arria Formula should be used in accordance with its original concept and should not be invoked in order to receive representatives of countries which are full Members of the United Nations, as that would be contrary to the principle of sovereign equality of States set out in Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 59, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ignacio ARCAYA
Ambassador